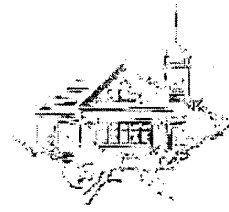


# *Santa Rita School District*


*"Improving the World with  
Every Student"*



## MEMORANDUM

January 10, 2000

TO: Honorable John M. Phillips, Presiding Judge of the Coordinated Trial Courts  
C/O Mr. Joe Tacker, 1999 Civil Grand Jury Foreman  
P.O. Box 414  
Salinas, CA 93902

FROM: Dr. Bob McLaughlin, Superintendent 

SUBJECT: **Response to the 1999 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury Report**

The 1999 Monterey County Civil Grand Jury conducted a comparison study of school districts within the County. It produced findings regarding (1) the STAR results, (2) percentages of teachers not fully certificated, (3) compensation to School Boards, and (4) the number and costs of criminal acts on school grounds.

It is a credit to the Grand Jury that it was concerned with education in Monterey County. However, the Jury's choice of topics, the data sources, and/or its analysis of that data show a lack of depth of understanding of issues regarding education. As a result the findings are particularly helpful. My concerns follow.

1. Student learning is a current popular and political topic of discussion, but it is always a topic of improvement in every school. As a result there has been real improvement in schooling in California and Monterey County over the years despite what politicians and the press would have you believe. The high school graduation rate, for example, in Monterey County has improved from only 50% in the mid-1950s to about 90% now. The number of students considering college, as evidenced by the increase in the number taking the college entrance exam (the SAT), and by the actual increase in those going to college has at least quadrupled in the same time. Only the fact that so many more are taking the SAT in California has actually reduced the state's average score. The SAT scores have actually increased for every ethnic and social group taking the test. Furthermore, according to the company which makes the test, the SAT is harder than it used to be.

Another measure showing the effectiveness of schools over time is rise in Intelligence Quotient (IQ) scores. Current measurements of the IQ of today's students show an increase of 10 points over those scores for their grandparents. Contrary to the public hype, the public schools in California are performing well and are constantly trying to be even better.

Therefore, the Grand Jury's use of the STAR results (a norm referenced test) alone to evaluate our schools is inappropriate. The test is considered inadequate for comprehensive evaluation of schools by every educational authority and testing expert. The current test was a political compromise, not an educationally rationale choice. The test is a norm-referenced, and the nation-wide norming group had only 3% limited English proficient (LEP) students. Monterey County, by comparison, has over ten times the percentage of LEP students as the norming sample. We have almost two times more than the state rate of LEP students. Because all but first year LEP students had to take the test in English, this single fact explains the relatively low scores for the county compared to the state. Furthermore, the test is not aligned with the state curricular standards. This lack of alignment

means that a mixed message has been sent to the schools: meet the curricular standards which are listed by the state for you, but pass a test on something else. Since the standards make sense to learning and the test does not, which would the Grand Jury recommend we emphasize?

But even the STAR results really shows that the county schools are quite effective. Given that about the percentage of students at or above grade level is about the same from year to year, the conclusion is that on average the students are actually growing a whole academic year for each year in school. Remember, the test covers one year's worth of curriculum, i.e. the test gets harder each year, so maintaining the same score really shows a year's growth. The conclusion is that Monterey schools are doing a good job evidenced by the growth each year. This is particularly impressive in Monterey County since many of the students are also learning a new language at the same time.

2. Teachers with interim credentials have always been a part of the system. It has gotten to crisis proportions nationally in recent years and particularly in California because of (1) the Class Size Reduction program in grades K through 3 which began in 1997, (2) the increase of retiring teachers as "baby boom" teachers grow older, and (3) the loss of new teachers in the first few years of teaching. The Grand Jury's "investigation" of this issue can be of no value except to alert the public, which has already been done.

Schools are all doing what they can both temporarily and permanently to certify their teachers. Colleges are creating programs to produce a greater number of teachers. The state has increased incentives to keep current teachers on the job past normal retirement until new teachers can replace them. Many of the new teacher candidates are interns working and going to school at the same time. The County Office of Education, districts and colleges now provide a wealth of support programs. Teachers who do well as interns will eventually be stronger because their training applies directly to their every day work.

The overall issue of lack of teachers is a problem of demographics, and is a national problem: increasing numbers of students and the retirement of a large cadre of older teachers. The problem will not go away soon. School districts, government, and colleges have created a number of programs which will eventually help.

3. Compensation to school boards is limited by law, and no district has violated the law. The Grand Jury's implication that there is something wrong because there were "disproportionate costs comparisons" is misleading. All districts had no less than five nor more than seven board members whether the district had 100 or 10,000 student. No matter the size of the district, the job of board member is the same. Therefore, a comparison of the cost of Board compensation (if any) per student (ADA) will naturally result in higher per-student-costs in smaller districts. Of course, Boards can refuse any or all aspects of compensation, but the work done by the board is of such great value to the public and school community that it is entirely justified if taken.

4. For the second year, the Grand Jury's "investigation" of the School Crime Report is less than helpful due to reliance on only the state report. The statistics produced by the state School Crime Report are subject to significant incorrect interpretations. Even with annual training that many of the county's districts take, I believe there is still a wide range of reporting practices. Also, the classification of districts into only elementary or secondary causes inappropriate comparisons. Specifically, Santa Rita Union School District (serving grades K through 8) is compared to elementary districts (serving only grades K - 6). The comparison of middle school students to primary and elementary students is entirely inappropriate. Most suspensions and all expulsions are at the middle or high school levels. Furthermore, the number of "crimes" reported actually indicates the number of crimes solved and is testimony to the diligence and talent of the disciplinary staff and teachers. The cost of crimes (usually vandalism) can easily be inflated by a single costly incident in a smaller district like Santa Rita. In our case the most vandalism was caused by adults stealing equipment from the schools which does not really relate to student safety on campus. In conclusion, the Crime Report is not a valid and reliable source for the Grand Jury's consideration and should not be used to compare one district to another.

**SANTA RITA SCHOOL DISTRICT'S RESPONSE  
TO THE 1999 GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Recommendation 1: "School Board Members and Superintendents [should] use STAR results to evaluate assignment of personnel."

RESPONSE: Santa Rita disagrees in part with this recommendation. The STAR program can only be a part of a comprehensive evaluation of personnel. Far too many intervening variables are factors in a student's achievement to blame or credit it all to a teacher or principal. Furthermore, state law and teacher contracts limit the use of nor in reference testing in an evaluation.

ACTION: The recommendation will not be implemented as stated because it is not reasonable. To the degree that useful procedures, state law, and the teacher contract will allow, STAR results will be considered as one of many indicators of employee performance.

Recommendation 2: "Hiring practices [should] ensure that certificated teachers are placed in the classroom. While it is recognized not every excellent teacher is fully certificated, it is counter productive to have a high percentage not fully certificated."

RESPONSE: Santa Rita disagrees in part with this recommendation. Current law and regulations allow temporary certification while teachers work to finish their credential work. In Santa Rita 0 teachers are, therefore, legally certificated with some teachers in the process of completing their work. Given the lack of fully credentialed teachers in the job market nationwide, this is the only way classroom teaching positions will be filled in the next few years.

ACTION: The recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 3: "School Board Members search their collective conscience to determine if school funds could be better spent on students rather than on individuals performing what is a public service."

RESPONSE: Santa Rita disagrees in part with this recommendation. That someone would do the work of a school board member totally without compensation is commendable. However, the job is too important not to begrudge the legal compensation for the literally thousands of hours of work and study, the wise guidance toward a vision of excellence, and the tough decisions to maintain fiscal accountability which the job requires. If a relatively small amount of money will encourage talented board members to maintain their dedication at the loss of family time and some personal costs, then it is in the public's interest to pay up to what the law allows if the district can afford it within its budget process.

ACTION: The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not reasonable. However, periodically, the Board has and will again review its policy on Board compensation. In 1993 compensation was suspended during a period of fiscal concerns. The Board will reserve the right to reconsider its own compensation at its own discretion.

Recommendation 4: "Each school district ensure that programs in place to help prevent school crime and vandalism are monitored. Those found guilty of crimes be prosecuted to the full extent of the law."

RESPONSE: Santa Rita agrees with this recommendation. However, please note that districts which implement this recommendation rigorously will actually increase the crime statistics, not reduce them.

ACTION: The recommendation has been implemented.